

POVERTY AND RICHES

NO. 2364

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich,
yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”
2 Corinthians 8:9*

I AM very weary tonight, having had day after day, almost without cessation, to make a supreme effort to address large assemblies. I felt therefore, that the only subject that I could handle would be some theme that was restful, and did not require any great thought on the part of the preacher or his hearers. I want to have a bath and rest myself while I am speaking to you, and peradventure, it may not hurt you either, for I doubt not that you often grow weary with daily cares. So we shall have no difficult problem, no mysterious doctrine, to consider at this time, but shall only talk about things that we know.

The text begins, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You know this, for you believe it. You have no doubt whatever that there was a wondrous graciousness in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace is an attribute of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and you know that there was infinite grace, favor, compassion, in the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it was that, and not your merits, which constrained Him to lay aside the royalties of heaven, and endure the sufferings and the griefs of our mortality. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

You know this grace too, because you have learned to perceive the outcome of it. You not only know it as a seed, but you know the blessed flowers that have grown out of it, because in His grace, He became poor that you might be rich, and in taking of those riches which He has procured for you, you have not only drunk of His bitter cup, but you have drunk of the spiced wine of His pomegranate, so that you now know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ by that which is the fruit and the outcome of it.

I think that the apostle here meant that we also know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ through what He has done for us. We might have known, as a matter of fact, that Jesus was gracious, but we could not have seen it so as practically to know it if He, having been rich, had not become poor, that we through His poverty might be rich.

The way the apostle shows that truth is just this. He was urging the Corinthian Christians to liberality. They were a far richer community than the church at Philippi, but He tells them that the churches of Macedonia, out of their poverty, had often been generous to the poor, and he persuades these Corinthians who were better off, not to be behind the Philippians.

After Paul had quoted to them this example, he felt that he had a far stronger argument to fall back upon. He seemed to say, “How am I to know your grace except by your works? How am I to know that you have Christ in your hearts except by what you give out of your grace to help your poorer friends?” He then gives this as the proof that we must see grace by the results it produces, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ by this fact, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

The same law, that the grace within must be manifest by the action without, applies to Christ as well as to us. If He had not become poor to make us rich, how should we have fully known His grace? And if you and I do not give of our substance, and of our talents, to the poor, and to the cause of Christ, how shall we know, and how shall others know that there is any grace at all within our hearts?

Beloved, as I have said before, I may say to you again, ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ because you have not only heard it, but you have seen it, you have tasted and handled the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Your hope of heaven lies in that grace, your daily comfort lies there. If Christ were not gracious, you would be graceless. If you did not know His grace, you would have no grace of your own, for certain, for it is from Him, as from an ever-flowing fountain, that all the streams of grace come to you. Happy men and happy women if, as I read this text, “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” you can each one say, “Yes, I do know it, glory be to God!”

There are two things for me to talk about tonight, they are both very simple, and lie on the surface of the text. The first is *the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and the second is *the riches of His saints*.

I. First, let us think of THE POVERTY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.”

This poverty was voluntarily undertaken for our sakes. There was no need that Christ should be poor except for our sakes. Some persons are born poor, and it seems as if with all their struggles, they could never rise out of poverty, but of our Lord Jesus Christ it can truly be said, “He was rich.”

Shall I take you back in thought to the glories of the eternity when as very God of very God, He dwelt in the bosom of the Father? He was so rich that all He possessed was as nothing to Him. He was not dependent upon any of the angels He had created, nor did He rely for glory upon any of the works of His hands. Truly, heaven was His abode, but He could have made ten thousand heavens if He had willed to do so. All the greatest wonders He had ever made were but specimens of what He could make.

He had all possibility of inconceivable and immeasurable wealth within His power, yet He laid aside all that, denied Himself the power to enrich Himself, and came down to earth that He might help us. His poverty was all voluntary, there was a necessity laid upon Him, but the sole necessity was His own love. There was no need, as far as He was concerned, that He should ever be poor, the only need was because we were in need, and He loved us so that He would rescue us from poverty, and make us eternally rich.

Our Lord’s was also very emphatic poverty. I believe that it is quite true that no one knows the pinch of poverty like a person who has once been rich. It is your fallen emperor who has to beg his bread, who knows what beggary is. It is the man who once possessed broad acres who at last has to hire his lodging in a miserable garret, who knows what poverty is. So was it with the Savior, He was emphatically rich.

You cannot press into the word “rich” all that Jesus was, you have to feel that it is a very poor word, even though it be rich, with which to describe His heavenly condition. He was emphatically rich, and so when He descended into poverty, it was poverty with an emphasis laid upon it, the contrast was so great.

The difference between the richest and the poorest man is just nothing compared with the difference between Christ in the glory of His Godhead and Christ in His humiliation, the stoop was altogether immeasurable. You cannot describe His riches, and you cannot describe His poverty. You have never had any idea of how high He was as God, and you can never imagine how low He stooped when He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

His poverty then, was voluntarily undertaken and it was emphasized by its contrast to the riches He had before. Now let us try to examine some of the details of this poverty.

First, this poverty of Christ was seen *in His condition*. It was great poverty to Him to be a man. Humanity is a poor thing when you set it in comparison with the Deity. What a narrow space does man fill, but God is infinite. What little can man do, yet God is omnipotent. How little does man know, and God is omniscient. How confined is man to a single spot, and God is omnipresent. I say not that Jesus ever ceased to be God, but we do remember that He became man, and in becoming man, He became poor in comparison with His condition as God. But then, as man, He was also a poor man.

He might have been born in marble halls, swaying the scepter of universal empire, and from His birth receiving the homage of all mankind. But instead of that, you know, He was reputed to be the carpenter’s son, His mother was but a humble Jewish maid, and His birthplace was a stable—poor accommodation for the Prince of the kings of the earth.

His early life was spent in a carpentry shop, and afterwards His companions were mostly poor fishermen. You do not find Him consorting with the senators and philosophers and great ones of the earth, but He goes from one lowly home to another, and for His maintenance He is dependent upon the alms of His followers. Certain women ministered unto Him of their substance. He was all His life familiar with poverty, so that He could say, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

You remember that passage which is broken up by our translators so as to make a chapter begin where there should be no division, "Every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives," for He had not a house, His only home was among the olive trees where He pleaded with His God.

Then remember that Christ, while He was here, was a servant, He was the servant of the Father. Though He counted it not robbery to be equal with God, yet He took upon Himself the form of a servant. He has been well called by the Latins, "*Servus servorum*," the Servant of servants, and you see Him in that character when He rises from supper, lays aside His garments, takes a towel, and girds Himself, and pouring water into a basin, begins to wash His disciples' feet. Well did He say, "I am among you as he that serveth." He before whom the brightest seraph veils his face, and lies low in humble adoration, yet washes His disciples' feet. You can understand then, how in His condition He is numbered among the poor.

Perhaps the poverty of Christ is seen more clearly as to His condition, in His association, not only with poor disciples, but with the despised of mankind. The Pharisees truly said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." This was the occasion when Luke wrote, "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him." He made Himself their companion for their good, for He had come to seek and to save that which was lost.

He condescended to be amongst the very lowest, nay, He did not sometimes stoop to them, but He seemed to be ever in their midst, always raking in the mire to find the jewels that had been lost there. So, beloved, you will see that as a man, a poor man, a servant, and associating with the very lowest of men for their good, Christ had become indeed poor in His condition.

The second point of His poverty was *in His reputation*. All glory belonged to Christ, the praises of all the heavenly host were gladly given to Him, but He made Himself of no reputation. Often, while He was here, men treated Him with all the scorn and contempt that they could possibly display. Let me quote these words slowly, "Then did they spit in his face." They blindfolded Him, they buffeted Him, they smote Him with the palms of their hands, saying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?"

They called Him, "a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners." They took His reputation from Him, some even went so far as to say that He wrought His miracles through Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. It was not possible that they could degrade Him lower than they did, their scorn went to the very uttermost against this blessed and adorable Son of God.

Even those who were reputed to be good men, at times thought little of Him. His mother and His brethren tried to entrap Him because they evidently judged that He was insane, and in the time of His direst need all His disciples fled from Him and left Him alone. In His greatest extremity no man did Him homage, but everyone had an ill word for Him. In this respect He was poor, that He made Himself of no reputation.

I do not know whether any of you ever had to do what has fallen to the lot of some few, after standing in good repute among your brethren, deliberately, knowing what you did, to do that which subject you to misrepresentation, and scandal, and scorn, and to do it for the Lord's sake, and to suffer all the consequences without wincing. I can tell you that it is a poverty indeed to a tender spirit to be bereft of the respect which one has long enjoyed, yet the Savior, out of love of us, stripped Himself of every single vestment of honor that He had a right to wear, and He became despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. This was a part of His poverty, poverty of reputation.

Then thirdly, there was a poverty *in operation*, for the Lord Jesus Christ in His own natural estate was able to do anything that He pleased, there was nothing which He wished to do which He could not do. Did He but judge it right to create or to destroy, all was in His power, but when He came to this earth, for our sakes He became poor. It was necessary then for Him to put a restraint upon His own omnipotence. He is an hungred, but it is a temptation of the evil one which suggests to Him that He should turn stones into bread. He is thirsty, and at a word from Him the water would have leaped from the well, but He has to beg of a woman of Samaria and say to her, "Give me to drink."

He never works a miracle on His own behalf. He makes Himself as poor as to His operations, as unable to help Himself, as the most incapable among us, and this, mark you, by a continued determination of His will that He would remain poor, for had He so determined, He could with but a wish, have summoned legions of angels to come from heaven to His assistance. How can I sufficiently admire this voluntary poverty of operation? Our Lord Jesus Christ will restrict Himself to loss, and suffering, and even to death, when naturally He possesses the power to deliver Himself from all these trials.

The next kind of poverty that I see in Christ is poverty *in communion*. If a man were never so poor, yet if he could always associate with persons of education and refinement, supposing him to be a man of that kind, poverty would be a small matter. "We cultivate," said the Edinburgh students, "we cultivate literature upon a little oatmeal porridge," and nobody seems to pity them. Nobody needs to pity them, they are quite willing to take the porridge if they can get the literature. If they can associate with men of thought and men of standing, they have a feast of reason, and have a flow of soul, and they are content with a little oatmeal if that is their only fare.

But our Savior never consorted with anybody who could for a moment be called His equal, He learned from no man. There was one disciple whom Jesus loved, we can all tell why He loved John, because he was the nearest to his Master, but what a long way down it was from Jesus to John! It makes a man feel himself in an awful solitude when he outgrows his fellows. You may pine for such a position, young man, and long to reach the very highest peak of the mountain, but it is cold up there, and bleak, and lonely.

I believe far greater enjoyment is to be had when you are the equal of your fellow men, and can associate with them as such. But as for our Lord and Master, He seems always on the pinnacle of the temple, or the summit of the mountain. I know that in His condescension He never is there, He stoops to the people, but still it is a stoop, and stooping, you know, is back aching work, I mean, it is heart aching work to be always having to stoop, and to have nobody who is your comrade and associate.

Jesus shut Himself off from the grandest company that He might have had, from the senate of the skies, from the assemblies of the perfect, from the multitude of angels. The heavenly beings may come and go casually with errands from on high, but for the most part, Jesus is here to associate with the sinful, His perfect mind to be in constant contact with the ignorant, His trained and cultured and holy spirit to be vexed by the frivolous and the fickle who cannot be depended upon.

What a poverty must the faithful, the just, the true, the wise Savior have felt when even His disciples could not understand Him, and when, as He unveiled some of the deeper truths He had come to reveal, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." It was a greater poverty still when, in the garden, rising from the agony and bloody sweat, He found the three that were nearest to Him sleeping, and He said to them, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" Ah, then was He in the depths of poverty indeed as to the communion of His spirit.

Still, I think that we have not reached the lowest deeps of the Savior's poverty till we come to the fact of His *bearing sin*. A man may be very poor as to worldly goods, and he may be able to bear it. He may have taken another's debts upon himself, and they may press heavily upon him, yet the load may not crush Him, but when he loses his character because of no wrong of his own, but because he wishes to deliver another, and when he has to come into contact with the sin of another and cannot help coming into contact with it, if his mind is pure and innocent, it is an awful poverty to him.

Brethren, it is the greatest miracle I ever heard of that the Lamb of God should bear the sin of men at all, and should so bear sin as to take it away, because remember there was in Christ no taint of sin of any kind. There was no inclination to sin in Him, and yet (hear these inspired words), “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Of course, the Savior never could be sinful, and we will use no words that might even suggest such a thought, we would with indignation repudiate such an idea, but yet He did occupy the sinner’s place, He did endure the sinner’s curse, “As it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”

Nay, I will even dare to say that before the Lord God, He stood as the one sinner, though He was no sinner, but the Lord made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all. Jesus stood to answer the summons of the law, and to appear there as the Substitute for His people, “the just for the unjust,” but still, to appear there for the unjust, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” Let me give you those words again, “who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”

For Him who was “God over all, blessed for ever,” for Him without whom was not anything made that was made, for Him to whom the cherubim and seraphim continually do cry, “Holy, holy, holy,” this must be abject poverty indeed, that though He was rich in holiness, for our sakes He became poor in bearing our sin.

The end of His poverty, and the climax of it, was when *at last He died*. We have perhaps never realized the wonder that He “who only hath immortality” did actually die. His spirit departed, He gave up the ghost, the ghost who had been a guest within His body, He gave up that guest, and His body was tenantless, an empty house.

What a sight is that (I wonder not that great painters have tried to depict it), the taking of Christ down from the cross, the wrapping of His mangled body in the fair white linen and the precious spices! Can this really be the Son of God, the Redeemer of men? Do they wrap Him up in a winding sheet, and do the holy men and women actually bear Him to a tomb? Yes, and to a borrowed tomb, for as He had lain in a borrowed cradle, He now sleeps in a borrowed sepulcher. They put Him there, for He is dead, His eyes are as firmly closed as those of any other dead man, and His hands are as cold and motionless, for Christ’s was no fancied death.

The Lord of life and glory did actually die, and there in Joseph’s tomb, was He buried, and thence He rose the third day. As the earth quakes, and the angel rolls away the stone from the sepulcher, say to yourselves, “You know now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor,” so poor that He actually lay awhile dead in Joseph’s tomb.

There I leave this first point, may God the Holy Spirit help us to understand the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ!

II. But now, dear friends, very rapidly, but yet I trust deliberately, I want to show you THE RICHES OF BELIEVERS.

They are exactly parallel with the poverty of Christ. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come into the world to become poor with regard to money, or that you and I might become rich in worldly wealth, for many of the best of His people are as poor as poverty still so far as this paltry pelf is concerned, but He came to give us true riches as He came to endure true poverty.

I have brought before your notice a poverty that did not lie so much in the scantiness of His apparel, or in the hardness of His fare, as in other matters. So the riches which Christ gives do not lie in our being clothed in scarlet and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, but they are similar in character to the marks of our Lord’s poverty.

First then, He made His people rich *in condition*. Brethren and sisters, we are servants, as Christ was, but that which was a lowering to Him is a lifting up for us. To us there is no greater honor than to be called the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to wait upon the servants of God, to be *servus servorum*, is a privilege that any one of us might covet. To wash the disciples’ feet is an honor to us now, and we feel it to be so. If the servant is permitted to be as his Master, it is a great exaltation for him.

By Christ's poverty, we are made rich in our condition, so that today we are the sons of God, today we have access to the mercy seat, today God hearkens to the voice of a man, today Jesus has made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign forever and ever. The condition of the believing man is a highly exalted one in proportion as the condition of Christ was one of humiliation and poverty.

So is it with regard to the believer *in his reputation*. Oh, brethren, what a reputation Christ has given us now! He has given us the reputation which He threw away, for now we are righteous in His righteousness, we are comely in the comeliness which He puts upon us, we have a name and a place now better than that of sons and daughters. We are not now reckoned among the guilty, but among the godly, we are not numbered among the rebellious strangers, but among the obedient children. Oh, blessed be the name of Jesus, He has clothed us with honor because He clothed Himself with shame!

The same is true as to *our operation*. I showed you how Christ voluntarily narrowed and limited His power, but behold how He has widened our power! There is a text I often look at and admire. Jesus said, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall He do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father." He makes us to have an almost boundless power, we are nothing but poor feeble men, and yet how wonderfully does God use men!

Have you never noticed in Paul's epistles, how he represents the minister of Christ as being both father and mother to a newborn soul? Writing to Philemon, he says, "I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds," and to the Galatians he writes, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Is it not a very wonderful thing that we should be called "workers together with God," our weakness working side by side with omnipotence itself?

My brothers and sisters, perhaps you do not know how greatly Christ has enriched you. Have you ever proved how rich He has made you in the power of prayer? "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." We do not make enough use of the great name of Christ, if we did, we should work miracles, I mean not in the material world, but spiritual miracles would be at our beck and call. Our great Lord Jesus, by His poverty of operation, has made us rich in a wondrous power of grace.

I said also that He had become poor *in communion*, and I showed you how narrow was the circle of men with whom He could associate, but He has wonderfully enriched us in communion, so that we have come "to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are written in heaven." Behold, He has given us such fellowship with Himself that He says of us who believe, "These are my mother, and my sister, and my brethren." We have fellowship also with God. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." What riches He has given us here!

Next, you remember I spoke about Christ's bearing sin as being an awful instance of His poverty, but by His substitution we have *acceptance with God*. See how rich He has made us, for we are "accepted in the Beloved." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." That is a wonderful passage in Jeremiah's prophecy, "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, the Lord our righteousness." What, the church itself called "The Lord our righteousness"? Yes, she takes her husband's name, the church has Christ's own title bestowed upon her. Christ became poor indeed as He stood in our stead, but He has fixed us in a large and wealthy place by giving us complete acceptance with the Father through His righteousness.

Then, as I completed the story, I pictured our Lord Jesus as lying in the death sleep of the tomb, but think, O beloved, that He has now, in consequence of that death, given us *eternal life*. His own words are, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Because Christ died, we live, because He died, we shall never die. The capital sentence has been executed upon our Substitute, and can never be executed again. Punishment cannot be inflicted first on the bleeding Surety, and then on those for whom that Surety stood, therefore we live by His death, and over us the second death can have no power.

Death is not annihilation, no thoughtful person ever fancies that it is. Death is the separation of the soul from the body, death in its highest sense is the separation of the soul from God. We may know the first death, the rending of the soul from the body, but the second death, the separation of the soul from God, that we shall never know, for Jesus knew it on our behalf when He said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

But now, "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." Oh, how rich He has made us in the indestructible everlasting life which He has bestowed upon us through His atoning death and His glorious resurrection!

I close with just these two or three remarks which the subject suggests.

First, if such is the result of Christ's poverty, "that ye through his poverty might be rich," what will the result of His riches be? If by His death we live, what must be the outcome of His life? If by His humiliation we are so enriched, what will come of His glory? If by His first coming, when He came as a sin-offering, all this is accomplished, what may not be expected when He shall come a second time without a sin-offering unto salvation? Try and work out that problem if you can.

Here is another. If Christ's poverty is such as I have tried to describe it, what must the riches of His people be? If our riches are proportionate to His poverty, what rich people we are! He was poor as poor can be, and we, if we are believing in Him, are as rich as rich can be. So low as He went, so high do we rise. That is how the scales of the sanctuary act, as He sinks, we go up. Will you try to see how high you must be according to this standard? What riches must belong to you when you judge of them by Christ's poverty!

The next question is, if such be our riches, why do we complain of poverty? There stands a child of God, who does not know whether he has any grace. He is putting his hand into his soul's pocket to see whether he can find a pennyworth of grace. My brother, all things are yours if you are Christ's, for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.

There is many a child of the King, who is entitled to reign like a prince, who continues to live like a miser. He weighs every ounce he eats, he starves himself spiritually nigh unto death. What are you at? Why should not you to whom God has given Christ—that is to say, everything—be glad in the Lord, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory?

I close with one more question. If such was His poverty, why should not we also, for His glory, be willing to be poor? If He would throw aside His honor, why should not we throw ours aside? If He gave up His ease, why should not we give up ours? If He was willing to be a servant, why should not we be servants? If He made Himself of no reputation, why should not we do the same?

That is very different from the action of my friend over there who said, "Well, you know, I shall not stand it, I do not think that I should be treated like that, I really feel that I ought to be more respected." Ah, poor soul, if you knew yourself, you would not talk so! Who among us deserves any respect? They call us "Reverend." It makes me sick to think that any mortal man should be considered a "reverend" person. What reverence can be due to us except that every wife is to "see that she reverence her husband"? That is Scriptural, but it is never said that every hearer is to reverence the preacher. Oh, what poor creatures we are at our best!

If God were to permit us to be doormats to the church, it would be too high an honor for us. I have seen a broom sometimes, outside a door where farming men come to brush their boots, it is a grand thing for a man to be just like that. I think that I am getting very near to that honor and glory, so many are scraping their boots against me just now, and I am well content that it should be so if they get some of the mud off, and do not go and spoil God's floor inside.

Let all of us feel that what becomes of us matters nothing at all, let us be willing to die in a ditch so long as Jesus Christ sits on the throne, and His great truth is established in the world. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor." Go and imitate Him, and be willing to be nothing at all, if only He may be all in all. God bless you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

Psalm 22:1-21

This marvelous psalm is a wonderful prophecy, which might seem as if it had been composed after the suffering of our Lord, yet it was written many hundreds of years before His incarnation and death. It is “a Psalm of David,” and is dedicated “To the chief Musician upon Ajeleth Shahar,” or as the margin renders it, “the hind of the morning.” We know who that hunted hind of the morning is, we seem to see him panting, his flanks white with foam, pressed by the dogs, almost torn to pieces by the cruel enemy.

The psalm begins with words that, in all their fullness, belong to nobody else but our Well-beloved.

Verse 1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

Every word is emphatic, you may put the stress where you please, upon every single word. “My God, my God.” With two hands He takes hold on God, crying, “My God, my God,” “Eloi, Eloi, my Strong One, why hast *Thou* forsaken me?” Or read it, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” “Why hast thou forsaken me?” “Why hast thou forsaken *me*?” You get a different shade of meaning each time, but each meaning is true.

1. *Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

The Savior’s prayers had ceased to be articulate. They had become in His own judgement like the pained crying of a wounded beast. He calls them “my roaring.” Oh, what prayers were those of our Lord on the cross! Sometimes we too feel as if we could not pray, we can only sigh, and sob, and groan. Well, if it even came to roaring, we would have a fuller sympathy with Christ, for He could say, “Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?”

2-3. *O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.*

Jesus will find no fault with God. Even if in His dire extremity God forsakes Him, yet He will not utter even a whisper against Him, “Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.”

4-6. *Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man;*

The allusion here is to a little red worm which, when it is crushed, seems to be all blood and nothing else, and the Savior compares Himself to that little red worm, “and no man.”

6. *A reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

They would not let Him be numbered with them, they accounted Him as an offcast and an outcast.

7-8. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.*

Will you try to picture the Savior saying all these words as He hangs upon the cross? That is the best commentary upon the psalm. Hanging there, nailed to the cruel wood, in terrible bodily and mental anguish and deserted of God, He soliloquizes after this sad fashion. You will understand it all so well if you have Him in your mind’s eye as we are reading.

9-10. *But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly.*

We could not help ourselves then, at the moment of our birth, everything depended upon God, and so it does in the moment of our death. It is well to remember those years of helpless infancy, when we could not feed ourselves. We were taken care of then, when we hung in absolute impotence upon our mother’s breast, then surely, if a second childhood should come, if all our powers should fail us, and we should be once more as weak as we were at our birth, He that helped us in the beginning will help us in the end. Thus the Savior comforted Himself as He went on praying—

11. *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*

Oh, the bitterness of that cry, “None to help”! “They have all gone. The disciples have all fled. Judas has betrayed Me. Peter has denied Me. There is none to help. Be not far from Me.”

There stand the Roman soldiers, and the high priest, and the Scribes and Pharisees, and Jesus says—

12-14. *Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint:*

They were no doubt dislocated by the dreadful shaking and jarring that our Savior must have suffered when they dashed the cross into the hole dug for it.

14. *My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

When the heart goes, everything goes, when the heart fails, and begins to melt, then it seems as if everything is loosening, and the man is in the anguish of death.

15. *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;*

Our Lord was parched with the fever brought on by the terrible anguish and strain upon the hands and feet, which are full of nerves and very tender. A slight wound of the thumb has brought on lockjaw, but what the wounds of the Savior’s delicate and sensitive body must have been, we cannot possibly tell, “My tongue cleaveth to my jaws.”

15. *And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

He felt as if His very frame was all turning to the dust of which the body is made. So complete is the upbreking of the whole manhood when a strong fever is upon one.

16. *For dogs have compassed me:*

There was the ribald crowd, not this time the bulls of Bashan, the great ones, but the mob, the masses of the common people hooting at Him, “Dogs have compassed me.”

16. *The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.*

Can anybody else be speaking here but Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, the King of the Jews? Now is this hind of the morning hunted till the dogs and the hunters have made a circle round Him. “The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me.” Here is Christ’s crucifixion beyond all doubt, “They pierced my hands and my feet.”

17. *I may tell all my bones:*

He is so emaciated that as He looks down upon His body, He says, “I may tell all my bones.”

17. *They look and stare upon me.*

The delicate modesty of the Savior is shocked. They have stripped Him, and hung Him up, and there they stand and gloat, their cruel eyes upon His matchless body, “They look and stare upon me.”

18. *They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*

How accurate is this description even to the least detail! How wondrously was this poet-prophet inspired when he thus drew the portrait of the crucified Christ! “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

19-21. *But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword: my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

So far, you see, the psalm describes the sufferings of our Divine Redeemer, and then it changes. The light of the sun has broken out from the midday darkness. God has smiled on Him once more, and the psalm changes its tone altogether as the Savior congratulates Himself upon the result of His passion.

The psalm ends with these memorable words, “It is finished.” Our version puts it, “He hath done this.” It might just as well be rendered, “It is finished,” for the sense is precisely the same, and when Jesus had said this, He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—282, 942, 278

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.